DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 478 221 CG 032 449

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TITLE	Cybersupervision: Conducting Supervision on the Information Superhighway.
PUB DATE	2004-00-00
NOTE	5p.; In: CyberBytes: Highlighting Compelling Uses of Technology in Counseling; see CG 032 440.
PUB TYPE	Reports - Descriptive (141)
EDRS PRICE	EDRS Price MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS	*Computer Mediated Communication; *Counselor Supervision; *Counselor Training; *Distance Education; *Instructional Effectiveness; Internship Programs; Practicum Supervision
IDENTIFIERS	Online Counseling; *Video Teleconferencing

ABSTRACT

The internship experience is an integral part of the graduate program for counselor education students. The APA Code of Ethics and Standards of Practice and the ACPA code of ethics require that students receive regular supervision from site and faculty supervisors during the practicum and internship experiences. However, when student counselors are at distant locations the provision of adequate supervision is a challenge. In such instances student counselors and supervisors attempt to maintain contact through such mediums as the telephone and more recently, e-mail. The purpose of this article is to introduce a new form of distance supervision, cybersupervision. Cybersupervision utilizes Internet videoconferencing to facilitate the counselor supervision process. This article describes the concept of cybersupervision, details technological requirements and discusses advantages and limitations of this form of supervision. (Author)

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Cybersupervision: Conducting Supervision on the Information Superhighway

by

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Chapter Fourteen

Cybersupervision: Conducting Supervision on the Information Superhighway

by Diane Coursol

Brief Overview

The internship experience is an integral part of the graduate program for counselor education students. The ACA Code of Ethics and Standards of Practice and the ACPA code of ethics require that students receive regular supervision from site and faculty supervisors during the practicum and internship experiences. However, when student counselors are at distant locations the provision of adequate supervision is a challenge. In such instances student counselors and supervisors attempt to maintain contact through such mediums as the telephone and more recently, e-mail (Casey, Bloom & Moan, 1994).

The purpose of this article is to introduce a new form of distance supervision, cybersupervision. Cybersupervision utilizes Internet videoconferencing to facilitate the counselor supervision process. This article describes the concept of cybersupervision, details technological requirements and discusses advantages and limitations of this form of supervision.

Discussion

Cybersupervision utilizes Internet videoconferencing to enhance the supervision of student counselors. Internet videoconferencing allows supervisors and student counselors to see and talk to each other in real time from the convenience of their desktops (Fetterman, 1996). Cybersupervision is particularly useful when supervising student counselors at remote sites or when student counselors are in a broadly dispersed geographical area.

Basic hardware requirements include a computer with at least 10 megabytes (MB) of hard drive space, a modem with a bandwidth of 28.8 kbps or higher, and a point-to-point protocol (PPP) for dial-up connection. An Internet connection with an Internet Provider (IP) address is necessary for participants at both ends of the communication process. Additionally, a camera is required for all sites participating in cybersupervision. Software requirements include appropriate videoconferencing software that is H.323 compliant. A variety of H.323 compliant videoconferencing software packages are now available including SmithMicro/Video Link Pro, White Pine/CU-SeeMe, and Microsoft /NetMeeting.

Cybersupervision has a variety of applications for the counseling supervision process. It can be used for individual supervision, group supervision, case conferencing, consultation and case management. E-mail has made the supervisory process easier as it allows for regular contact between clinical supervisors and counselor educators (Casey et al, 1994). Cybersupervision enhances this process as it offers the additional benefits of voice, text and image.

Supervisors can use cybersupervision for both individual and group supervision. Student counselors at remote sites can now attend the practicum and internship class with their peers. The flexibility of this technology allows group participants to either share their communication with the whole group or privately with another group participant without involving the whole group (Fetterman, 1996). Meanwhile, group participants can simultaneously communicate with each other through written text format.

Apart from enhancing the direct supervisory process, cybersupervision enables the faculty supervisor to conduct site visits in real time with the student counselors and their site supervisors. Prior to cybersupervision, interactions were limited by geographical distance and usually involved unidimensional formats such as the telephone or e-mail (Casey et. al, 1994).

Another important use of cybersupervision is consultation. Through cybersupervision student counselors can consult in real time with their faculty supervisor on challenging client cases. The audio-visual format provides faculty supervisors with a better sense of the student counselors' concerns as they can observe both verbal and

nonverbal behavior. Thus, cybersupervision affords faculty supervisors a clearer understanding of the counseling skills and capabilities of their student counselors.

Recommended Course of Action

Before student counselors leave for their practicums/internships they should be trained to use the technology appropriately (Fetterman, 1996). Student counselors should practice installing and using the audio and text features of this technology before they attempt to use it at their remote site. Through these practice simulations, student counselors can become proficient with videoconferencing procedures and if necessary, can troubleshoot effectively.

An ideal on-campus training scenario requires students to install software, and simulate a cybersupervision communication exchange with their peers. Departments can develop a handout describing the cybersupervision process for student counselors that contains information about equipment requirements, installation instructions, and frequently asked questions (FAQs). This handout can also be shared with the site supervisors so that they are also familiar with the process.

Communication is facilitated when student counselors are trained in the communication protocols of cybersupervision. These communication protocols include appropriate timing between communication exchanges and communicating with text when necessary (Fetterman, 1996). Students can practice such communication protocols in the classroom prior to the beginning of their on-site experiences.

With changing student demographics and needs, cybersupervision offers several advantages for student counselors and faculty. Cybersupervision, with its audio-visual capability, provides a more interactive alternative to the unidimensional format of e-mail or the telephone for student counselors and supervisors separated by geographical distances.

Cybersupervision allows student counselors to participate fully in their practicum or internship class. Though student counselors may be separated physically by distance, they can "virtually" attend class. Pedagogically, the student receives the benefits of learning from peers and receiving peer feedback as well as the opportunity to develop the skills of peer consultation and collegiality.

Cybersupervision allows faculty supervisors to "cybercommute" over the information superhighway to meet with their student counselors in real time. These "cybercommutes" allow faculty to spend less time on the road and more time productively consulting with the student counselors and their site supervisors.

With cybersupervision, counseling departments can encourage students to seek practicum and internship opportunities at more distant locations across the country and indeed the world. With cybersupervision, student counselors are only as far as the click of a mouse. This expands the pool of internship opportunities for student counselors.

Cybersupervision is particularly helpful when student counselors require additional support. Fetterman (1996) noted that the effectiveness of electronic communication increases when verbal and nonverbal cues are available. The visual contact provided through cybersupervision gives student counselors a greater sense of security and support, thus enhancing communication between student counselors and their supervisors.

Finally, cybersupervision offers a solution to the dearth of qualified supervisors in the field (Sampson, Kolodinsky & Greeno, 1997). Counselors, who require supervision for licensure, certification or other reasons, would have access to qualified supervisors at distant locations when local supervisory services are not readily available.

Cybersupervision is not without limitations. The National Board of Certified Counselors (NBCC) and the American Counseling Association (ACA) have delineated standards for the ethical practice of clinical supervision that must be incorporated into the practice of cybersupervision. Welfel (1998) cautions counselors to consider the potential ethical issues related to the use of technology in the practice of counseling and supervision. Some of the major limitations include informed consent, confidentiality, client welfare, supervisee welfare, and emergency response procedures. It is important to recognize that these issues are equally paramount in the standard face-to-face clinical practice and supervision.

In line with standard clinical supervision procedures, clients and student counselors should be informed that their confidentiality will be protected and be aware of the procedures used to ensure confidentiality. Additionally, clients and student counselors should be informed about the length of time and the documentation procedures of cybersupervisory sessions. Student counselors must be assured that their information is secure so

that they are willing to discuss issues critical to their professional development.

To ensure privacy and confidentiality, counselor educators are advised to train students in appropriate procedures and protocols to ensure client privacy and confidentiality. Such protocols include selecting a confidential location for cybersupervision and avoiding the use of identifying client information during the cybersupervision process. Supervisors and student counselors can use ID numbers instead of client names. The protocol for handling crises should also be clearly established and shared with student counselors.

Summary and Conclusions

Technology will continue to play a more significant role in the counseling profession thereby revolutionizing the counseling supervision process. Cybersupervision adapts an emerging technology to facilitate the counseling supervision process. It is a cost-effective means for reaching a large number of student counselors at remote sites.

For faculty supervisors, cybersupervision provides a real, dynamic and interactive connection to student counselors at remote practicum and internship sites. As this technological innovation becomes more commonplace, supervisors will continue to find more creative uses to improve the quality of counselor supervision. While the initial benefits of cybersupervision are clear, its full potential has yet to be realized.

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